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POSTLIBERATION POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH KOREA

Formation of the North Korean People's Committee.

In October 1945, North Korea's Five Provinces Conference was held in P'yongyang. One hundred and ten delegates, representing the provincial people's committees met at the conference and formed the provisional administrative organ, composed of ten bureaus, to undertake the political unification of North Korea, and to act upon the numerous postliberation problems that had arisen.

On 7 February 1946, the representatives of various democratic and socialistic parties, chairmen of provincial people's committees, and the directors of the newly organized administrative bureaus met in P'yongyang for a joint conference, to pave the way for the establishment of the provisional government and thereby eliminate the local autonomy held by regional people's committees. The joint conference organized the North Korean People's Committee and appointed Kim Il Sung its chairman. Formed without outside intervention, the North Korean People's Committee was truly the answer to the basic desire of the Korean people, as it was fully aware of the needs and interests of all social strata of the Korean public, particularly of the working masses.

To cement the legal foundation of this new form of government, the election to the People's Committee was held, first in 1946 for the committees in provinces, cities, counties, and in 1947 for those in townships and villages. The elections for the various levels of committees were conducted strictly according to basic democratic principles, that is, by direct, impartial, and secret ballot in an atmosphere of absolute freedom. Thus, for the first time the people saw and experienced genuine democracy at work. Suffrage was granted to all citizens over 21 regardless of sex, length of residence, or degree of wealth. Exceptions to this rule were those legally indicted as pro-Japanese, reactionary, or mental patients, and those who had lost their voting rights through court decisions. This group numbered 4,367, which is only 1/2,000th of the total voting population.

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The number of voters reached 7 million, and 39 political and social organizations participated in the election; 99.6 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots.

The occupational breakdown of the 70,454 persons elected to the various levels of the people's committees was as follows: farmers 55,366, laborers 4,182, clerks 8,697, intellectuals 829, merchants 877, industrialists and entrepreneurs 55, religious workers 211, former landowners 32, and handicraftsmen 5.

The composition of the committeemen by political affiliation was: Labor Party 57.7 percent, Democratic Party 7.7 percent, Youth Party 5.3 percent, and nonaffiliated 29.3 percent.

A noteworthy result of the election was that 9,488, or 13.1 percent of the total elected members, were women.

The general convention of the People's Committee was held in February 1947, and the North Korean People's Assembly was established. It was composed of the members of the People's Committee and the representatives of various political parties elected by the general convention. The structure of the North Korean government was thus completed.

A parallel development of this period was the workers' and social organizations. The Workers' League, which now has 405,000 members, rapidly gained its foothold during the 3-year postliberation period. In addition, the Farmers' League with 2,500,000 members, the Democratic Women's League with 1,180,000 members, and the Democratic Youth League with 1,300,000 members, were also organized. In July 1946, these, together with other organizations launched the North Korean Democratic People's Front movement. With its formidable numerical and political strength, the above movement bravely challenged the evils of capitalistic imperialism. Its role in building the foundation for the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was indeed great.

On 23 March 1946, the Twenty-Plank Platform was declared. This distinctly set forth the basic policy for the formation of the true democratic government in North Korea. The policy was quickly put into practice, and in that month the Land Reform, Labor, Sex Equality laws and the Industrial Nationalization Act were put into effect.

Land Reform and Elimination of Feudalism

The agricultural system of North Korea before land reform was a typical illustration of feudalism. There were 1,004,600 farm households in North Korea before the reform, of which 69,400, or 6.8 percent of the total, were landowners. These relatively few landowners owned 1,144,900 chungbo (one chungbo is 2.451 acres), or 58.8 percent of the total arable land. About 80 percent of the total farm population were landless tenant farmers who lived like slaves at the mercy of the landowners.

In 1942, there were 4,475,725 chungbo of rice and dry fields in all Korea, and 2,775,762 chungbo, or 62.2 percent of the total, were in the hands of landowners, while the tenant farmers, representing 96 percent of the total farm households, owned as little as 1,699,963 chungbo, or 7.8 percent [sic] of the total (source: Liberation Annual, 1946).

These tenant farmers paid notoriously high rent, generally ranging from 50 to 90 percent of the crop. In addition, under the established custom of the master-servant relationship, the tenants were compelled to contribute gifts in kind and labor lest they be evicted from their land. Also, the Japanese government imposed upon them the compulsory grain-collection system, and loan sharks were rampant in the villages.

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All these factors kept the landless farmers in torment. In 1945, 7 percent of the total farm population was heavily indebted to landowners. Debts per family averaged 155 won. Over 77 percent of the farmers virtually starved during each spring sowing season.

Under the Land Reform Law promulgated on 5 March 1946, a total of 1,090,320 chungbo of land was confiscated from landowners. Of this, 981,398 chungbo were redistributed free to the landless farmers, 22,387 chungbo to hired farmers, 603,407 chungbo to landless tenants, 345,974 chungbo to farmers with below-the-minimum acreage, and 9,622 chungbo to the dispossessed landowners who had moved to other counties. More than 500,000 families were benefited by land reform.

In order to stabilize agricultural economy and to improve cultural conditions, on 27 June 1946 the Committee issued a law governing the tax in kind, by which the farmer paid the tax in grain at rates of 10 - 27 percent of the crop.

Farm conditions soon began to improve: in 1947 over 100,000 families built new homes. In P'yongan Namdo, for example, 10,740 new houses were built and 7,000 repaired during the one-year period preceding June 1947. Among the farmers who built new houses, 7,795 families were once destitute during the Japanese occupation. Beside new houses, these farmers in P'yongan Namdo bought 4,766 head of cattle, 1,880 thrashing machines, and 10,730 units of other farm equipment in 1947. The so-called Patriotic Rice Movement launched in Chasryong County, Rwanhae-do, in December 1946 was the direct expression of the gratitude of the farmers toward the new North Korean regime.

Working Conditions Improve

The average working hour of the Korean worker under the Japanese Zaibatsu was from 12 to 14 hours a day. From January through August 1940, there were 623 cases of labor disputes, involving 49,000 workers. Not until 24 June 1946, when the North Korean People's Committee passed the new Labor Law, did the Korean worker have an 8-hour day, legislative protection and a social security system.

Under the Labor Law, the workers gained the following advantages in addition to the above:

1. A 7-hour day for workers engaged in hazardous occupations.
2. A 5- to 6-hour day for juvenile workers between the ages of 14 and 16. Working is prohibited for juveniles under 14 years of age.
3. Vacation with pay, 2 weeks for adult workers, one month for juvenile workers, each year.
4. Free medical care; financial aid for those who are temporarily incapacitated due to illness or accident; annual pension for those permanently incapacitated; annual pension and funeral expenses for those who die in line of duty.
5. Provision for 35-day prenaternity and 42-day postnaternity rest periods for female workers, and free nursing hours in the shop.
6. Stipulation of working conditions between management and employee; privilege of collective bargaining.
7. Equal pay for equal amount of work, regardless of sex, age, or race.

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The advancement of wages, efficiency, and output during the 1946 and 1948 People's Economic Plan has been phenomenal. Wages increased during the first quarter 1948 to 135.6 percent that of 1946, and production increased to 232.7 percent of 1946.

Twenty nine public nurseries, 22 child care centers for workers, 15 public resort centers and 2,545 trade agreements were approved by the Workers' League during 1948. As a result of the rapid development of the people's economy, unemployment was reduced to such an extent that a labor shortage is now felt.

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The Women's Role in the Cultural Development

We now painfully recall that before the liberation almost the entire female population of Korea was illiterate. Women were almost completely deprived of cultural privileges, except for the 20 percent of the female population with elementary education and the 5 percent with high-school education. A surprising number of women led the so-called "Kisang" life, the public and private prostitution system encouraged by the Japanese. These women were eventually shipped out to Manchuria and North China and were enslaved by the capitalist bloodsuckers. The Sex Equality Law, proclaimed on 30 July 1946, gave freedom to Korean women for the first time in history.

The Sex Equality Law was significant both politically and sociologically in that women constituted more than half of the Korean population. The effect of the law was immediately registered by the fact that 34 women members were elected to the People's Assembly, 453 to the city and county committees, 1,986 to the township committees, and 7,049 to the village committees.

Many important public and private positions were also occupied by women. The North Korea Women's League now has 1,180,000 members.

Industrial Reform

The Industrial Nationalization Act proclaimed on 10 August 1946 completely changed the manufacturing, transportation, communications, banking, and other important industrial systems of North Korea. As the result of the industrial reform, 1,034 separate industrial entities monopolized by the few Japanese, pro-Japanese Koreans, and reactionaries were returned to the people. The collective ownership of industries brought about a drastic improvement in industrial efficiency. Notably, in 1947 the furnaces of the Kwanghae Iron-works were completely restored to working condition and the production of pig iron was started. The Ch'ongjin Textile Mill also resumed the manufacture of rayon. In general, the People's Economic Plan for 1947 attained 102.5 percent of the goal, and there is no doubt that the record for the first half of 1948 will also surpass the goal.

The People's Economic Plan

North Korean economic reconstruction under the People's Economic Plan, nevertheless, had to overcome many difficulties:

1. The necessity of restoring in the shortest possible time the industrial facilities destroyed by the Japanese.
2. The lack of raw materials, technical knowledge, and trained technicians.
3. Various disadvantages arising from the political and economic division of Korea, and from the constant struggle against domestic and international reactionary pressures.

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These difficulties were, nevertheless, conquered at the end, thanks to the improved industrial efficiency and the patriot's fervor of the workers. The results of the Economic Plan according to various industries are briefly summarized below (announced at the Joint Conference by Chairman Kim Il Sung):

1. 1947 Production (1946 equals 100%)

Coal	280%
Carbide and fertilizer	200
Light industrial products	500
Ferrous metal products	300
Iron	700
Pig iron	2,300
Textile products	250

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2. Agriculture

The 1947 crop acreage was 100.4 percent of the original estimate. Grain production for 1947 increased by 180,000 tons over 1946.

3. Commerce

The rate of commodity flow in 1947 increased to more than 900 percent that of 1946, with the value amounting to over 7,582 million won.

4. Education

The preliberation colonial system of education was completely eliminated and a true, democratic educational system was established. At the same time, the number of schools increased by 35 percent and students by 26 percent over 1946. Now in 1948 there are 3,008 public schools and over 1,350,000 pupils in North Korea. There are also 574 secondary schools, with 250,000 students. During the Japanese occupation there were only two technical schools and six normal schools in North Korea. Now there are 54 technical schools, 13 normal schools, 3 teachers colleges, one engineering college, one medical college, and a university.

The Kim Il Sung University, composed of teachers, engineering, medical, and agricultural college, will also open in the fall of 1948. North Korea will then have a total of 11 colleges. A total of 20,360,000 copies of textbooks have been issued in North Korea.

5. Culture

Seventeen theatrical groups and eight orchestras were organized. The North Korean Motion Picture Studio was also built. In North Korea, there are 25 newspapers and 22 monthly periodicals published, totaling 100,002,779 copies. Recently, doctorate and bachelor degrees were conferred upon Kim Doo-bong and 12 other outstanding cultural leaders by the North Korean People's Committee at the 69th Assembly.

Another result of the People's Economic Plan was the substantial improvement of living conditions, resulting from a steady supply of the necessities of life at a low price. The North Korean working class now enjoys an increased real wage and lower prices. The rate of price decline of essential commodities from the quotation at the end of November 1947 to the quotation at the end of March 1948 is as follows (in percent): cotton 47, light bulbs 50, soap 46, matches 5, work shoes 50, rubber shoes 59, socks 62, towels 66, briquettes 60, dried pollack 62, pork 17, onions 72, confectionery 43, and lumber 40.

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Nationalized business and the development of the economic system are the factors mainly responsible for the price decline.

The North Korean People's Committee also has been greatly concerned with the welfare of the worker. Two and one-half years after the liberation the number of national hospitals increased to 770 percent of the preliberation number; hospital beds, to 760 percent; and clinics to 1,400 percent.

The Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The Committee for the enactment of the Provisional Constitution of Korea was formed in November 1947 by the decision of the People's Assembly. The above committee submitted the draft to the Fourth Assembly which convened in February 1948. Before adopting the constitution, the Assembly decided to make it public for study by the people. Thus, from 12 February to 25 April 1948 copies of the draft were circulated among all citizens of Korea. The constitution was supported by the absolute majority, including many citizens in South Korea. A meeting was called on 28 April 1948 by the People's Assembly, which forwarded the draft to the All-Korean Legislative Council for approval. The Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was thus adopted.

It was about this period that the South Korean puppet regime decided to carry out a separate election for South Korea in a move to separate the southern half permanently from the northern half and to enslave the South Korean populace for the benefit of the US imperialists. This was done in spite of the strong opposition by the Korean people.

Fifty-six political and social organizations of North and South Korea met in P'yongyang on 19 April 1948, just before the 10 May election in South Korea, and formulated a plan to launch a nationwide campaign against the election. The election went on in spite of the opposition, and the so-called "National Assembly" was fabricated as a result.

In response to this new development, the Council of the North and South Korean Political and Social Organizations decided to form the Supreme People's Assembly of Korea with a view toward establishing a central government in Korea. Thus, in accordance with the North Korean Constitution, the general election of the members to the Supreme People's Assembly of Korea took place on 25 August 1948. Nearly 4 million people attended the mass meetings held in more than 1,000 localities in North Korea, and pledged their loyal support of the election.

This climaxed the period of brilliant postliberation accomplishments in North Korea, marked by the historic beginning of the North Korean People's Committee, the unforgettable land reform, labor law, industrial recovery, the People's Economic Plan, and finally, the Constitution of North Korea. Thus, step by step, we steadily approach the goal of unification and sovereign independence of the Fatherland.

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